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CANCER RESEARCH (INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE, PARIS, 1910).

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COPY of REPORT of E. F. BASHFORD, Esq., M.D., General Superintendent of Research and Director of the Laboratory of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, Delegate of His Majesty's Government to the Second International Conference on Cancer Research held at Paris from the 1st to the 5th October, 1910.

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Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty.

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LONDON :  
PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

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PRINTED BY  
EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, LTD., EAST HARDING STREET, E.C.,  
PRINTERS TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY.

1911.

[Cd. 5590.]

Price  $\frac{1}{2}d$ .

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To the Right Honourable the Lord President of the Privy Council.

London,

MY LORD,

February 14th, 1911.

I HAVE the honour to report that, in accordance with your instructions, I attended the Second International Conference on Cancer which assembled in Paris from October 1st to 5th inclusive, under the patronage of the President of the French Republic. I arrived in Paris on Wednesday evening, September 28th, and left on the morning of October 6th. Notwithstanding that the desirability of consulting the full proceedings of the Conference has been the reason for the delay in submitting this report, and that the proceedings have not yet been published—although their issue was promised in November or early in December—nevertheless, I venture to submit the following report now, because the announcement has been made that a preliminary meeting will be held in May at the opening of the International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, in order to arrange for another Conference in Brussels in 1913. I shall be prepared to submit a supplementary report after the appearance of the full report of the proceedings in Paris, if need be.

The Conference was opened by M. Doumergue, Minister of Public Instruction, who presided over a large audience, and was supported on the platform by the representatives of the International Association for Cancer Research, and of the Association Française pour l'Étude du Cancer, as well as by one or more of the official delegates of each of the foreign Governments represented, in response to the invitations issued by the French Foreign Office. The Governments represented, in addition to France, comprised Argentina, Austria-Hungary, Bavaria, Bolivia, Brazil, Chili, China, Denmark, the German Empire, Great Britain, Greece, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Persia, Peru, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United States, and Würtemberg. Altogether over 150 persons were enrolled as members in response to the invitation to be present.

M. Doumergue, after some preliminary words of welcome, and to certain of the foreign delegates in particular, said that science had no frontiers, and emphasised the international importance of the disease the Conference had been called upon to discuss. M. Doumergue instanced, as a characteristic feature of our generation, the reunion in spontaneous congresses of the



representatives of various nations for the purpose of relieving physical, social, and moral miseries; he enlarged upon the significance of the unanimity of these humanitarian endeavours, extolled the advantages accruing from the exchange of views, and from the dissemination of discoveries, and pointed to the futility of isolation. In his opinion the publicity obtained for the proceedings of such conferences was bound to bear fruit in a profitable collaboration between the medical profession, the public in general, and those actually suffering from cancer.

The President of the Conference, Excellenz von Czerny of Heidelberg, followed, and entered into a technical discussion of some aspects of cancer which, in his opinion, was probably increasing, and of parasitic origin. Professor Landouzy spoke on behalf of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, alluding mainly to the future possibilities of treatment by therapeutic sera. Professor Bouchard, President of the French Association, having also addressed the meeting, the official delegates of foreign Governments were called upon in turn, in the first place the representative of His Majesty's Government.

The opening proceedings occupied the entire forenoon of October 1st, and in the afternoon the scientific proceedings were entered upon. The scientific proceedings were covered by dividing them into sections, which received consideration consecutively as follows:—(1) Histology and Histological Diagnosis; (2) Statistics; (3) Clinical Diagnosis; (4) Treatment; (5) Etiology and Experimental Pathogenesis; (6) Comparative Pathology.

(1) The opening discussion turned upon the inconvenience resulting from the employment in different countries of dissimilar names for identical cancerous lesions, and from the same terms being often employed in different senses. It was pointed out that in the present state of knowledge it was impossible to find a complete classification of cancers which would meet with international acceptance. As a result of the discussion the Conference adopted a resolution appointing a commission representing the different countries, for the purpose of drawing up an international nomenclature to be submitted to the next meeting of the Conference in 1913. This was the only resolution adopted by the Conference.

(2) A recommendation for the purpose of empowering a similar commission to compile comparable international statistics of cancer, by means of the issue of inquiry forms to be filled up by members of the medical profession, provoked much adverse criticism. Wide divergences of opinion were revealed as to the value of the methods which had been employed to take a "cancer census" in several countries in Europe, and the validity of the results obtained was seriously questioned. The proposal to form an International Commission to give effect to the recommendation was not carried.



(3) An account of the duration of cancer of the digestive tract brought out how frequently the first symptoms appeared, and the diagnoses were made, subsequent to a prolonged latent period which was neglected, because of the absence of any evidence of its existence. Subsequent papers, dealing with clinical diagnosis and the chemistry of cancer, left the impression that diagnosis by means of changes in the blood was not to be relied upon, and could not replace the older methods, even with all their shortcomings, which are due to the absence of a specific symptomatology of cancer. Several speakers expounded their views as to what might be done to enlighten the public in order that cancer might be diagnosed earlier, and thereby made more amenable to surgical treatment. Emphasis was also laid upon the fact that the education of the medical profession is just as essential in this respect.

(4) There were some very able papers on surgical treatment. They were followed by important discussions turning mainly upon the value of adjuvants to surgical treatment, such as fulguration, X rays, radium, &c. The consensus of opinion was against the employment of fulguration. The therapeutic employment of radium was fully discussed without any definite conclusion being arrived at; none of the speakers claimed that its use had superseded surgical treatment, nor was its use recommended without previous resort to surgery, in other than small superficial lesions. The general impression conveyed by the discussion was that treatment by sera and vaccines was not to be relied upon, and that, although many speakers had employed radium, the quantities had been far too small to enable them to pass a final judgment upon its value in the treatment of cancer.

(5) In the fifth section the proceedings were opened by a lucid and impartial account of the resistance which can be induced to the implantation and progressive growth of cancer in animals. Pessimistic interpretations of the phenomena in question were eschewed and optimistic views advanced. The phenomena discussed were interpreted to mean that fresh animals reacted against the implantation of cancer, and set up an active resistance to its growth in them. One speaker claimed that the evidence he advanced favoured the view that the serum of animals which had been rendered resistant to cancer, by artificial means, possesses curative properties analogous to those possessed by the anti-diphtheritic serum. Another speaker described the disappearance, or reduction in size, of true malignant new growths in man after repeatedly inoculating healthy human tissues; in other words, he claimed that certain of the means which have been satisfactorily demonstrated to prevent the implantation of cancer from one animal to another, and to hinder its growth when so transferred, were also efficacious to cure cancer in man.



When the subject of the causation of cancer came to be considered, the chief contribution dealt with the possibility of various intestinal and other parasitic worms, as well as of different skin parasites, playing the part of intermediate hosts, in transferring a hypothetical cancer virus from one individual to another. This contribution met with some criticism. In another contribution, the effort was made to emphasise the importance of statistical evidence in favour of the infective nature of cancer.

A valuable summary was also presented of the mass of evidence supporting the view, that cancerous tissue is really a biological alteration of the tissue proper to the individual attacked by the disease, and that its peculiar properties may be explained without assuming the intervention of extraneous agencies, such as a hypothetical cancer virus.

(6) Under comparative pathology there were grouped a number of papers dealing with the occurrence of cancer in lower animals and in plants. The most important paper dealt with certain tumours occurring in the sugar beets and allied plants. It was shown that these tumours can be grafted on other beets, both of the same and of different species. No causative parasites could be detected. From their general biological behaviour it appeared justifiable to assign to them in the vegetable kingdom a position analogous to that occupied by cancer in the animal kingdom. This contribution was of high value both as regards its originality and its far-reaching biological bearings upon the nature of cancer.

The delegates were entertained officially and privately on many occasions and on the most lavish scale. Among the hospitalities extended may be mentioned those offered by the President of the Conference, Excellenz von Czerny, Baron Henri de Rothschild, Treasurer of the French Association for the Study of Cancer, the Municipality of Paris at the Hôtel de Ville, and at Chantilly by Professor Bouchard, the President of the French Association for the Study of Cancer.

The closing ceremony of the Conference took place at the official dinner held at the Palais d'Orsay. On this occasion the office bearers of the Conference and the representatives of foreign Governments again addressed the delegates. The President then expressed his hope that the organisation of the International Association would be modified before another meeting was held, so that objections which had hitherto stood in the way of the affiliation of other countries, and particularly of Great Britain, would be removed. This promise of reform was, without doubt, the outcome of the private discussion amongst the delegates, on the one hand, with reference to the need for making the Association international in more than the mere name, and, on the other hand, with reference to the inadvisability of the International Association endeavouring to impose



upon other countries methods of statistical investigation, the value of which is disputed.

Reviewed as a whole, the Conference must be pronounced to have been of value. In my opinion, should another International Conference take place, it will be held under much more favourable auspices both as regards working arrangements and the selection of subjects for discussion and action, notwithstanding the fact, that knowledge of cancer is still so vague or ambiguous as to have prevented unanimity, or even a basis for discussion, from being obtained on many points at the Conference in Paris. In particular the delegates were divided upon such fundamental matters as the etiology of cancer, and on what is and what is not a legitimate application of statistical methods to the investigation of the frequency of cancer. Whilst some delegates, of high standing, advocated its parasitic or infectious nature, others of equal authority strongly opposed such a view. No progress was made towards compiling comparable international statistics of the incidence of cancer; nevertheless, in my opinion, the discussion of the plan proposed was a pressing need, of which the importance is but emphasised by the failure of the project to secure the approval of the delegates. Only good can result from discarding those fallacious methods by which attempts have been made to arrive at a speedy elucidation of the significance attaching to variations in the numbers of the deaths recorded from cancer in different countries at the same time, and in the same geographical area—large or small—at different times. These methods have been widely adopted in various European countries, and consist in taking a “cancer census” or enumeration of persons ill of cancer on a particular date, by means of inquiry forms filled up voluntarily by members of the medical profession. The decision was arrived at, in 1902–3, to recommend that such a method of investigation should not be adopted in this country. The wisdom of that decision would appear to have been endorsed by the attitude of the Conference towards the project laid before the delegates, for the compilation of international data of a similar kind, more particularly because many of the delegates also recognised, what has often been urged in vain in the past, viz., that the statistics of cancer cannot be treated apart. They are inseparably bound up with vital and mortality statistics as a whole, and an improvement in the value of the statistics of cancer, for the purposes of comparisons between different countries, can follow only from raising the general level of all the vital and mortality statistics of different countries. Such considerations and others, *e.g.*, that a “cancer census,” far from avoiding the fallacies inherent in all statistics of mortality from cancer, but exaggerates them, apparently influenced the delegates. The attitude of the Conference towards the statistical investigation of cancer marks a distinct advance towards what accurate statisticians have long recognised as the only sound

lines of investigation ; but it must also be pointed out, that under exceptional conditions a "cancer census" may possess advantages for special purposes.

So long as so much divergence of opinion due to continued ignorance prevails, it is obviously hopeless to attempt to devise rational measures, and futile to promote an international crusade for the prevention or reduction of the ravages of cancer, along the lines which are meeting with world-wide acceptance in the case of tuberculosis and leprosy. Considering all the circumstances, great credit is due to those officials and members of the French Association and of the German Association, to whose tact and organising ability was due the smooth and successful working of the Conference.

I have the honour to be, &c.

(Signed) E. F. BASHFORD.

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